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ABSTRACT

Prepared to serve as a basis for comment by both employers and consultants who have worked on projects in developing countries, this paper describes the consulting process, conditions that warrant employment of consultants, the various alternatives for selection of consultants, common problems encountered by consultants and employers, the range of results from such a process, and a basic operational plan for employers and consultants. Ten questions for panelists are listed as well as five references. (Author/EAA)

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The Consultant's Role in Library Development: Prelude for a Panel Discussion

by

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The Consultant's Role in Library Development: Prelude for a Panel Discussion

The purpose of this brief paper is to describe the consulting process, conditions that warrant employment of consultants, the various alternatives for selection of consultants, the common problems encountered by consultants and employer, the range of results from such a process and, lastly, a basic operational plan for employers and consultants. This paper will serve as a basis for comment by both employers and consultants who have worked on projects in developing countries. The resulting dialogue will provide a more realistic view of the benefits and problems involved in being a consultant and in using consultants in library development.

On the subject of the role of foreign consultants in library development especially in Third World Countries, the literature of librarianship is virtually silent. There are, to be sure, in a single of the International Library Review such articles as "Development Aid for University Library of the Third World "[1] describing the German Madras Project in which the Library of the Technological University of Berlin gave technical assistance to the Library of the Indian Institute of Technology, Madras from 1960-1974; and "Library Services at the National Inland Fisheries Institute, Bangkok, Thailand"[2] concerning the bilateral program between the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) and the Thai Department of Fisheries in which CIDA trained staff and provided technical assistance for the National In land Fisheries Institute. Both of these articles are typical of the type of descriptive articles that are scattered throughout the literature. Critical articles concerning the employment of consultants or teams of consultants and the satisfaction of employer and consultant are unavailable. The panelists will provide fresh insights into this area of library consulting.

What is a Consultant?

Various definitions of a library consultant have appeared in the literature. James Lockwood in his article " Involving Consultants in Library Change", adapted a definition of management engineer consultants

to librarianship:

> A library consultant may be defined as an individual qualified by education, experience, technical ability, and temperment to advise or assist on a professional basis in identifying, defining and solving specific library problems involving the organization, planning, direction, control and operation of a library. The consultant serves the library an an impartial, objective advisor and is not an employee of its organization.[3]

The essential elements of this definition are the professional abilities of the consultant coupled with the temperment or personal capability to advise, define or suggest solutions to library problems. Furthermore emphasis is placed upon the objectivity of the consultant as an outside impartial agent.

Some distinctions have been made between a consultant as one who works on a project from conception to evaluation and a critic who intervenes at a specific point in a project.[4] In practice these lines are not as defined and the critic and consultant can be considered as one role. Additionally some cynics have described consultants alternately as hired scapegoats, missionaries, change agents and occasionally peacemakers, depending of course on viewpoint and the image of the project consultant. Indeed while the formal definition of a consultant can be readily accepted these latter roles are also a part of the consultant's role and may be included in the hidden agenda of both the employer and the consultant himself.

The descriptors applied to the consultant's role vary as a function of the expectations of the employer and the ability of the consultant to fulfill both stated and unstated objectives. Ultimately, success for both employer and consultant depends upon communications, shared objectives, common perception of the problem, agreement as to preferred approaches to the problem and parameters of the project. Among the obstacles to understanding is that of intercultural communications. Definitions of the problem identify cultural differences, such as space, time territoriality and social conventions as blocks which must be overcome or neutralized.[5] Additionally, the human contacts made by the consultant are brief, lacking both past and future as well as many factors such

as time, space and social protical are at variance with the accepted mode of the consultant's culture. Take for example the space differences between American and Middle Easterner. The American prefers a substantial distance between himself and others in conversation. There is a colloquial phrase today that highlights this cultural phenomenon: "stay out of my space man". On the other hand when a Middle Easterner wants to have an exchange of ideas, wants to accent a particular feeling in conversation, he tends to move closer and closer to his colleague. Without meaning to do so, it is quite possible for the American to back away, to literally back himself in a corner as the Middle Easterner moves forward to make his point. In the jockeying for culturally acceptable space, understanding of the content of the interaction may be lost or in the extreme, each may perceive a degree of hostility in the other where none exists. The consultant like the traveler is adrift in a new social structure, without links to past and future. The consultant meets contemporaries, those who share a community of time. The essence of the consultants' experience is that he and his colleagues become "consociates"...individual who actually meet, share ideas and space as well as time.6

Knowing about a culture, values of time, space and priorities are important for successful interaction with other professionals. Some people never experience that often used phrase "culture shock" . A strange culture can place many demands on the consultant, resulting in mounting pressure of fatigue, strangeness, overtaxed health and encurance to feelings of separateness and intellectual inability to react to new situations and needs of daily living. Some consultants as well as the leisure travelers never experience culture shock and are flexible enough in life style to be able to adapt to new situations and to new patterns of interaction.

Situations that lead to the employment of consultants

There are a variety of consideration that lead libraries, national planning

agencies, universities and international agencies to seek the services of a consultant. A classic consulting situation exists when "desired expertise is lacking for significant portions of a project and when the period of required expertise is delineated " 7 Domestically in the United States the single most common situation is that of facilities planning. Internationally, the motivating force is by and large the overall lack of trained librarians in developing countries and their interest in technical expertise. Sometimes, foreign aid or international agencies make funds available for special projects and they customarily include extranational consultants as part of a standard package along with equipment and long term training of nationals. Generally speaking the reasons for employing an outside consultant include: technical expertise; specialized skills; fresh ideas; ability to focus on specific problems; objectivity and ability to excercise additional influence on decision makers.

Typical projects for consultants include: longrange planning, local surveys, collection development, architectural considerations, automation, development of bibliographic systems, library education, development of specific types of libraries within a country and establishment or improvement of national library services. Within these rather broad examples of consultant projects the function of the consultants range from influencing funding or governing agencies towards a particular viewpoint to mediating conflict within the existing system, providing a nonbiased, nonpolitical source of information, encouraging linkages and improving communications among professional reviewing current organization structures and recommending long range plans for development. A perceived benefit of employing a consultant is that of providing funding credibility ...the consultant with little vested interest supports for the world outside the library the need for additional recource allocation, increased budgets and staff requirements.

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Often however this is unrealistic since the range of the consultant's suggestions and ability to suggest improvements is limited by the hidden agenda of the employer and prehaps the financial interest of the consultant in being recommended for future employment and by the international organization. It may be difficult to satisfy the two masters--the host country and the international agency.

How are consultants found ?

The process is neither scientific nor uniform and often comprised of serendipity, and the invisible college instead of full information and adequate appraisal of a consultants credentials. The majority of consultants are found through the invisible college, that person-to-person interaction of professionals, and the experts used by such agencies as UNESCO,OAS, and CIDA . To use a personal example, last year I was contacted by the Instituto do Livro in Brazil to teach a course on school development. I had never to my knowledge met anyone from this organization nor applied for such a position. My name surfaced through this invisible network ...someone I had met at a professional meeting several years earlier. Once it was determined that I could arrange my schedule to meet their needs I was hired. My credentials were sent only about two weeks before I arrived. While in Brazil I was asked to recommend people for future consulting positions and thus perpetrated the network I critize. The whole situation points to the need for developing countries to have an adequate review process for consultants under consideration.

Another means of choosing professional consultants is through reputation and publications. Obviously a person's publications reflect his or her interests and may demonstrate levels of competency. However, reputation is an intangible measure. For example, someone who has an excellent reputation in his native country, and who has become well regarded by the library establishment may not be flexible enough to adapt time honored principles of one country to the exigencies of a developing one. And in fact, this highly regarded consultant

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may offer pat solutions to library problems and may take the attitude that since this is how it is done in New York, London or Munich the same approaches are valid in Lima, Kingston, Addis Ababa and Cairo. Invariably employment of such a consultant, often one who has never been abroad before leads to disenchantment, frustration and failure to adequately resolve the problem at hand. Other sources of consultants are derived from advertisements by the consulting firms or individuals themselves.

Single consultant or team is another common intial problem faced by employers. A single consultant is most appropriately employed in such situations as course development, library education seminars and self-contained studies. In other words, where a specialist or expert's advice is needed for a specific limited period. One of the major difficulties encountered by the single consultant is the lack of peer support, the inability to communicate with other experts on locations and the need to operate alone. At times this problem can be alleviated by the use of consulting teams; thus providing the opportunity for diversification, interaction and additional input from both outside and inhouse sources. While both consultant and employer strive for the ideal in the initial problem negotiation and establishing of understanding, subsequent problems that arise may ultimately be beyond both their control. Such factors as changes in government, policy, legislative barriers, political exigencies, bureaucratic snafus, staff changes and lact of clerical support or acts of God can be cited as exmples of uncontrollable forces. In order to minimize these problems at least one local expert conversant with library politics and ministry of education procedures should be assigned to the consultant or consultants as a troubleshooter and liaison officer.

What are the qualifications and qualities of a good consultant?

The most iaportat is the intangible asset of flexibility and cultural tolerance. Precisely those qualities which cannot be evaluated by traditional means such as position or publications. The ideal consultant is culturally tolerant, understands the people with whom he will work and posses the ability

to listen to inhouse priorities and capability of adapting to the new environment. While the consultant's technical espertise is essential, in specific situations it is often the generalist who can pull together the various strands of libarianship and app;y those ideas which best fit the problem at hand and bring together in a team effort the ideas of specialists.

Perhaps the best consultants are those judged to be "mavericks" of the profession. Maverick is an Americanism that refers to the lone steers who shunned the herd, crossing the plains. Mavericks very often are on the cutting edge of change, not afraid to voice unpopular opinions and to defend positions that are at odds with the norm. High prestige from the library community may even be synonymous with rigidity and bias towards one system.

Lastly consultants may be suggested or even mandated by such organizations as OAS or UNESCO. Here much depends upon the political clout of the individual and whether or not he or she has managed to become visible to the program directors. The variance in the quality of consultants is great.

If the current informal and formal structures are inadequate, what recourse do developing countries and employers have ? At this point little; however, an international clearing house could be established to form a data base of potential and active consultants, including curriculum vitae, language skills and availability. One potential organization to develop such a data base would of course be the IFLA. Searches could be made for a fee and consultants thus employed and listed charged a minimal fee for processing. Annually updated this would provide a first step in creating an appropriate vechicle for consultant search. National associations might assume responsibility for publicizing within individual countries. The International Relations Committee of the American Library Association is developing a roster of consultants which could be input into an international data base. The problem is to contact all persons not simply those in favor

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within national organizations and to provide a panel for evaluation of consultants. A model such as that used by the Accredition committee of the American Library Association might be used. When accrediting visits are scheduled, names of team members are submitted in advance with vital information and the university may accept or reject prior to actual contact with professionals. In addition, such a clearinghouse managed within IFLA might encourage a "two-way " flow of consultants, including use of experts from so-called "developing countries" in already developed countries. We have much to learn from each other.

The consulting process: things to ask or know before a project begins

Depending upon the level of complexity of a given project, anywhere from a single consultant to several teams and hundreds of individual activities may be involved. To be sure this latter type is rare but consider the vast social project for libraries in Iran in the early 70's with Nassar Sharify. In order to assure that both consultant and employer are in agreement as to the process, development and anticipated outcomes a structured process is desirable. The key phases in the planning and development of such a project might be organized along the line of a traditional management model;

1. Establish understanding
2. Preliminary goal and position statement
3. Commitment to the project
4. Resource Analysis
5. Conceptual planning
6. Plan approval
7. Master planning
8. Final Commitment
9. Staged Implementation
10. Evaluation and redirection of plan

In reality however, the consulting process is seldom so organized and may involve constant reevaluation and redifinition of the project's parameters. Answers to certain basic questions by the library agency should be

provided for the consultant including the following:

1. What is the nature of the problem to be addressed?
2. What are the anticipated outcomes of employing a consultant?
3. With whom will the consultant or consultants work? and at what level of the organization? and with what degree of authority ?
4. What is the history of the problem and what alternatives have been proposed and rejected or accepted and failed ?
5. What are the parameters of the problem, time constraints, budget requirments and staff allocations?

While it is important to establish understanding as a first step in the consulting process, invariably there are differences between paper descriptions of employment conditions, expectations and environment and the realty of the situation. To use a personal example, I arrived in Brazil to conduct a course on planning library service for children. All prior communications had been in English and while my vita indicates a knowledge of Spanish at no point as I asked and I surely never volunteered to teach in Spanish. Indeed I had made it a point to say that my Portuguese was nonexistent and I was prepared to teach in English. Upon arrival I found that while the students could indeed read English, they could not understand spoken English well. However, the course was to be taught in Spanish since that was our common language. Had I known beforehand I caould have prepared lecture notes in Spanish and brought the essential dictionary of technical terms. Luckily they supplied an interpreter who knew Spanish, Portuguese and English. An unexpected development which I warrant is not uncommon.

A consultant's work should precede in logical stages from preliminary investigation prior to departure, including reading digesting and evaluating appropriate materials, reports and literature, to preliminary interviews with employers to future clarify the goals and objectives of the project and the possible barriers to success and to the report of the possible alternative-

and implementation. In the area of possible solutions I am reminded of an event in Colombia. In a small town in the mountains the UNESCO sent a doctor to help establish a regional clinic. Upon arrival the doctor, to his dismay found that surgical instruments were being sterilized by boiling. He was quite disturbed at the lack of suitable equipment and immediately requested an autoclave. The most expensive autoclave arrived in due time and the doctor proudly plugged it in and prepared for an operation, assuming that he could use the new gadget to sterilize the instruments. No sooner had the autoclave been plugged in than not only did the lights in the hospital go out but the generator for the whole town was blown and did not operate again for a week. The autoclave, to my knowledge, still sits in the rural hospital, a monument to modern technology and its uselessness in certain situations. So too the library consultant must be careful to propose appropriate solutions not simply cosmetic changes from his or her own country. Alternatives should be appropriate to the environment in which they will exist. There is an example of a country striving to develop a library school and national library. Staff is comprised mainly of inhouse trained librarians with a few masters level librarians who have trained abroad. Not surprisingly, an extranational expert was brought in to help in the planning for these agencies. Among that consultant's recommendations was one better suited to developed countries, namely that the library employ only master's librarians. No interim process or training program was indicated. How unrealistic, yet not atypical of unimplemented plans proposed by inflexible consultants.

Once the consultants' report is tendered his or her job is completed. At this point the employer and the governing agencies should have a clear concept of what commitments must be made to carry out the project and it is time to commit legislation, change policies, allocate funds and begin project implementation. The implementation program should be phased and bridge the gap between the accepted development plans and the creation of an operational library program. The final stage is a major management challenge and lies in monitoring established

operations to assure quality services and adequate implementation.

It is important to realize that both the employer and the consultant assume a risk in the contractual process. While employers are wagering budget allocations and scarce resources, they retain the perogative to replace a consultant or reject a final report and seek additional advice. Consultants, on the other hand, risk their reputations with each project and their future job prospects. Reputations will be either enhanced or diminished as a function of the satisfaction of the employer. In cases where the host library or site for the project differs from the actual employer (such as an international agency) the possibility of satisfying both agencies may be difficult. The international agency may have outlined one plan of action or approach and the host country may have its own agenda. To whom is the consultant responsible? If the host library is not satisfied then the consultant has not fulfilled his mission; on the other hand if the international agency is not please the consultant is not likely to secure employment from that source in the near future. Consultants should be careful to choose projects for which they possess the necessary skills or can amass a team with such skills. In other words a project in which there is a good chance of success and in which the requirements of the job are clearly delineated.A brief summary of the consultant employer situation may be stated as let the employer beware and let the consultant take care.

Conclusion

To summarize, the most important aspect of any interaction between consultant and employer is the need for full disclosure on the part of the employer and of recognition of the environment and the constraints by the consultant. A mutually satisfactory conclusion is reached when both employer and consultant are sure of what is expected and tasks are completed within the budget and time limits.

Questions for panelists

1. What is the most common method of employing consultants? How are contacts with consultants made, through what formal and informal channels?

2. Why do developing countries hire consultants? Who finances these projects?

3. From the point of view of an employer what makes a good consultant? a ppor one?

4. From the point of view of the consultant what makes an appropriate project?

5. Can you give an example of a situation in which both employer and consultant were satisfied? What factors contributed to this success?

6. Can you give an example of a situation in which either or both employer or consultant were dissatisfied? Was failure inevitable? What changes would you make if it were possible to recontruct the project?

7. What suggestions do you have for improving the process of consulting in developing countries?

8. In what areas could experts from developing countries provide advice to developed countries? Is the concept of two-way exchanges and professional interaction valid? Of is the consulting, technical exchange necessarily solely a movement from developed to developing country?

NOTES

1. Ekkehard Henschee, " Development Aid for a University Library of the Third World" International Library Review (1978) 10: 29-42.

2. K. Eric Marshall, "Library Services at the National Inland Fisheries Institute, Bangkok, Thailand" International Library Review (1978) 10: 427-434.

3. James Lockwood, "Involving Consultants in Library Change" College and Research Libraries (November 1977) 33:6 p. 498.

4. Library Buildings Institute, Chicago, 1963. Problems in Planning Library Facilities: Consultants, Architects, Plans and Critiques: Proceedings. Ed. by William A. Katz and Roderick G. Swartz (Chicago: American Library Association, 1964), p. 12.

5. Edward C. Stewart "The Survival Stage of Intercultural Communications" photocopy np, nd. For more information on Stewart's theories of intercultural and cross-cultural communications see: Edward C. Stewart, American Cultural Patterns: A Cross-Cultural Perspective. (LaGrange Park, Ill: Intercultural Network, Inc., 1972).

6. See Stewart, "Survival Stage of Intercultural Communications".

7. Lockwood, p. 502.

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